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CEREBUS

GOING HOME

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248
NOV

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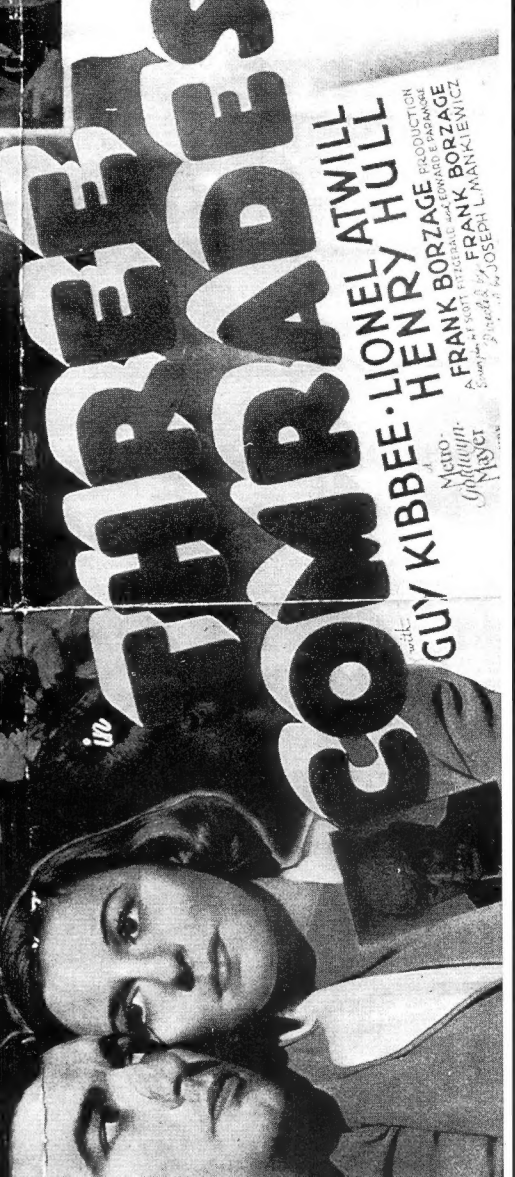

CEREBUS

NO. 248 NOVEMBER 1999

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GOING HOME

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BOOK ONE
Sudden Moves
(Cerebus 232 to 239)

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BOOK TWO
Fall and the River
(Cerebus 240 to 250)

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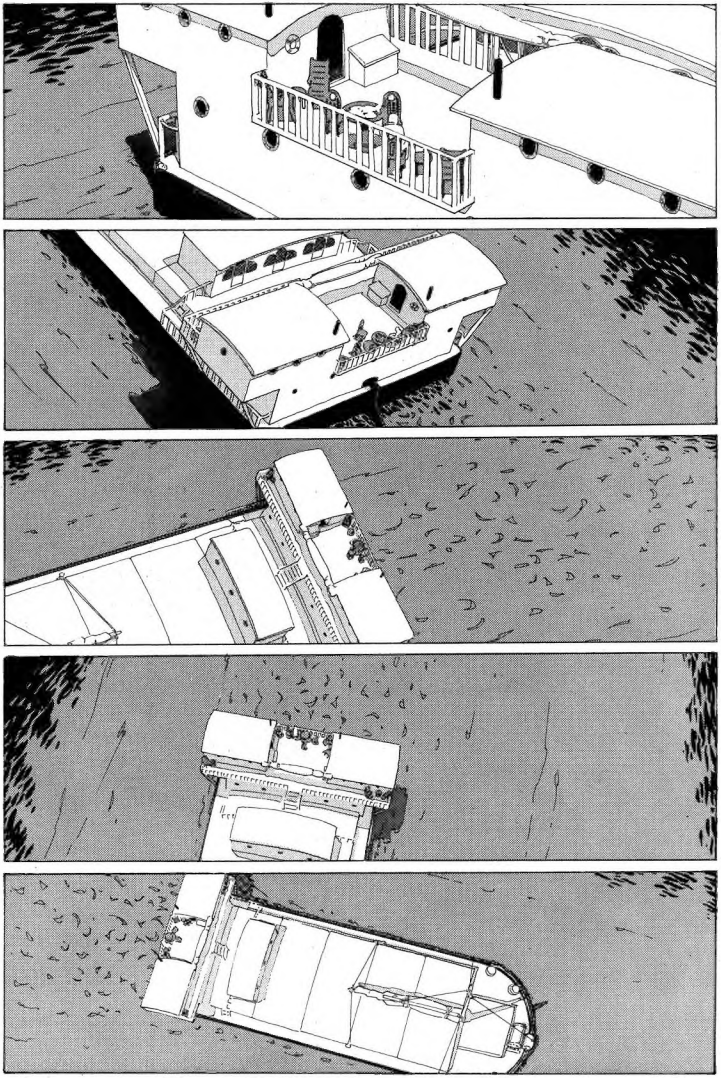
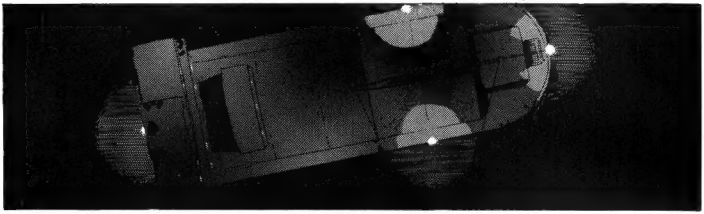
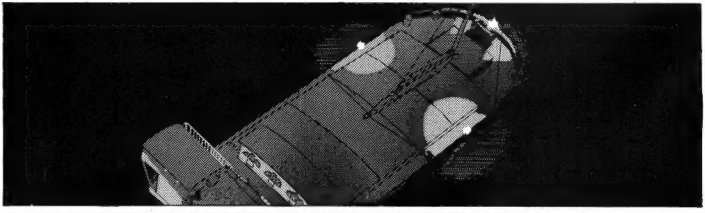
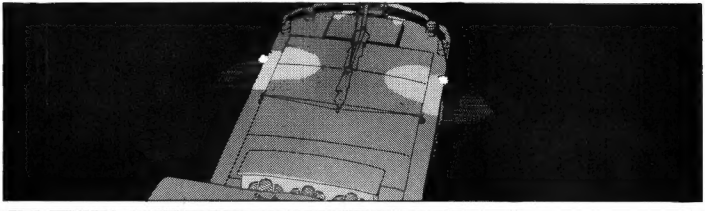
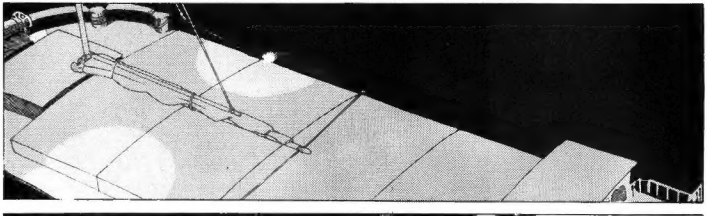
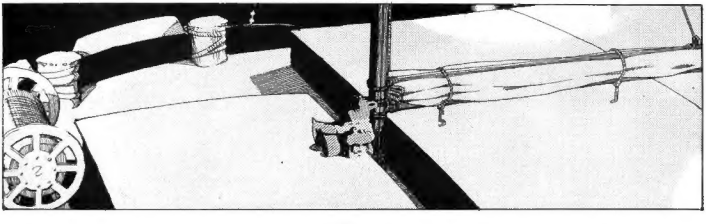


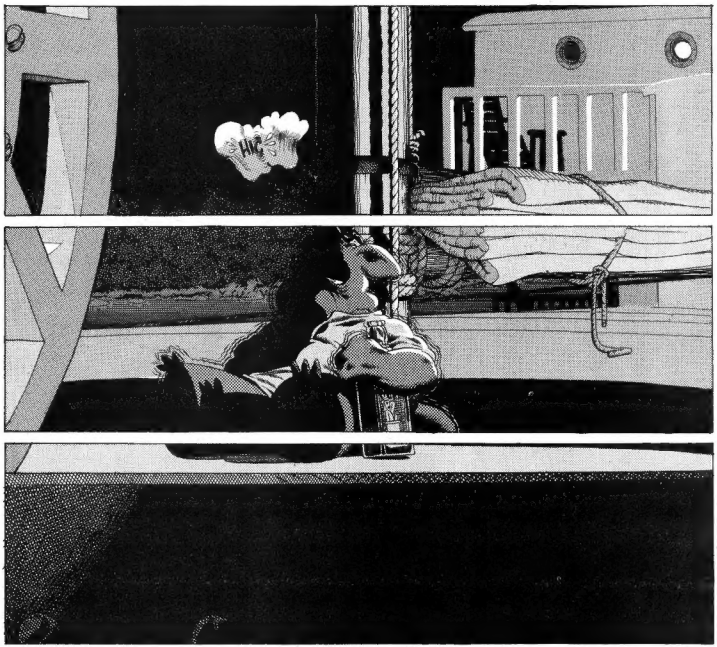












get you off on the right foot. Don't tell her you tried to hit me. She wouldn't like that. After that, just be happy every damn minute of your waking life and you've got her for as long as you want her."

He waited for that to sink in. I nodded.

UM, YOU WERE SO NICE TO ME WHEN I STARTED DANCING -- GIVING ME ADVICE AND ENCOURAGIN ME
A colony lacking ONLY ...one... crucial element...
a PATRONess
A colony lacking ONLY ...one... crucial element...
a PATRONess
I'VE BEEN LOOKING AT HER AND THINKING "LADY, YOU ARE TOO OLD TO BE DOING THIS."
IF SHE WAS TOO OLD, THEN WHAT WAS I?
SO RIGHT THEN AND THERE I DECIDED I WAS GOING TO DANCE FOR ONE MORE YEAR AND THEN GIVE IT UP FOREVER!
JUST LIKE THAT.
WELL -- APART FROM DRINKING MYSELF STUPID EVERY NIGHT FOR A MONTH AND BITING EVERYONE'S HEAD OFF WHO TRIED TO TALK TO ME
A colony lacking ONLY ...one... crucial element...
a PATRONess.
UH-HUH

Miss Tavere... I...
I need to ... TALK.
... I...
I KNOW, MR. KENNEDY ... WE...
WE BOTH DO.

OH!
EXCUSE ME, MR KENNEDY —I—
I NEED TO— LIE DOWN
KA KLAK KLAK
I KNOW PRESIDENT,
...NR
ME BOTH ...DO...
THA DUMP

KA KLAK
.KRIK.
KLAK
THROB THROB
ZIP
THROB THROB
KA-
Klak
ZIP
THROB THROB
THROB?

SO?
"I don't know WHY you SO refuse to be an ADULT about this."
THROB
DO YOU INTEND TO STAY OUT HERE ALL NIGHT?
"An ADULT?! YOU tell Cerebro that you're in LOVE with ANOTHER MAN..."
"that you're in LOVE with...u th..."
THROB THROB
YOU SAID YOU WANNED TO BE AN ADULT
LOVE
"...with perhaps the GREATEST LIVING WRITER in ALL of ESTARCION..."
Throb Throb

"RIGHT"
"NOW"
IS WHAT I SAID.
"AND YOU EXPECT CEREBUS TO BE AN ADULT ABOUT IT?"
AND THAT WAS HOURS AGO
"LOWER YOUR VOICE .. "HE might be WRITING'
LOOK.
EITHER COME BACK TO THE STATEROOM.
WITH.
ME.
"Cerebus has no NEED to lower his voice, Jaka- Cerebus has said ALL he inTENDS to say to you.."
"..NOW.."
"...and forEVER!"

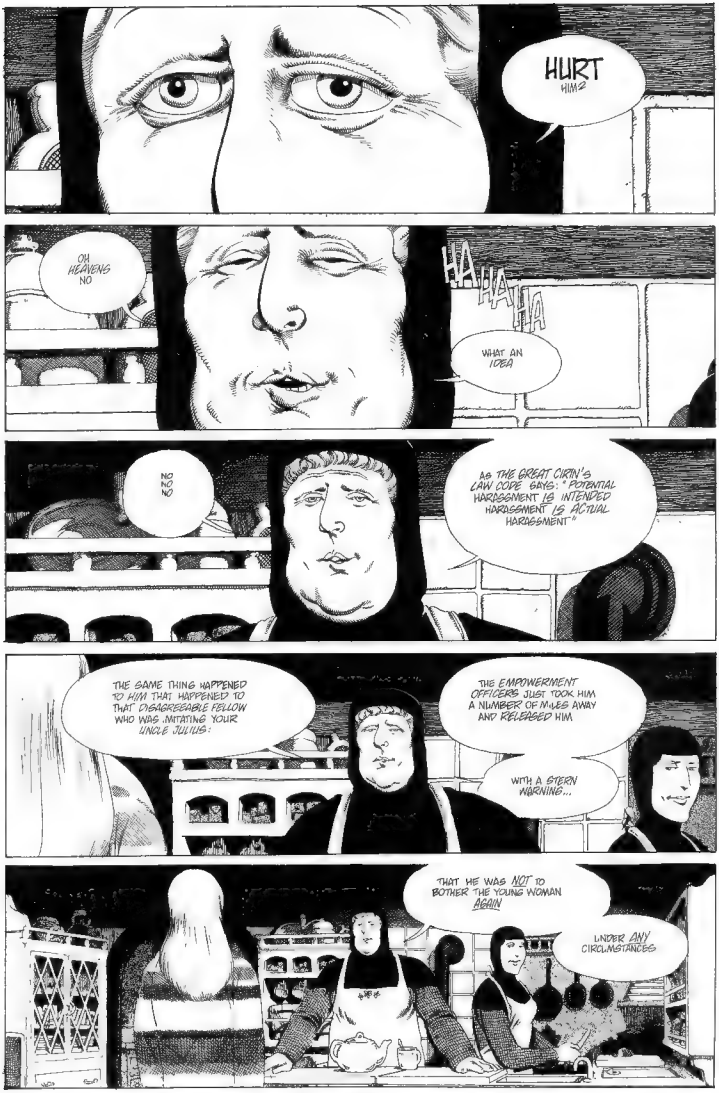
OR
I'LL GO UP AND GET A COUPLE OF PILLOWS AND SOME BLANKETS
"In THAT case...Cerebus.. I rather suppose that I"
"...TOO..."
"have said ALL that I shall ever say to you..."
"...NOW"
"...and for EVER"
AND WE CAN BOTH STAY OUT HERE ALL NIGHT AND CATCH PNEUMONIA!
SNORE SNORE
"TROUBLE?"
"Miss Tavers?"
"OH!"
"No"
"No trouble"
"It's all over between Cerebus and myself."
"That's all"
THROB
THROB

CHATTER CHATTER TWITCH
"I'm so SORRY"
"DON'T be"
"It's been over for some time"
"It's just taken me this long to realize it."
THROB THROB
Miss Tavens
"I-
..I.."
THROB

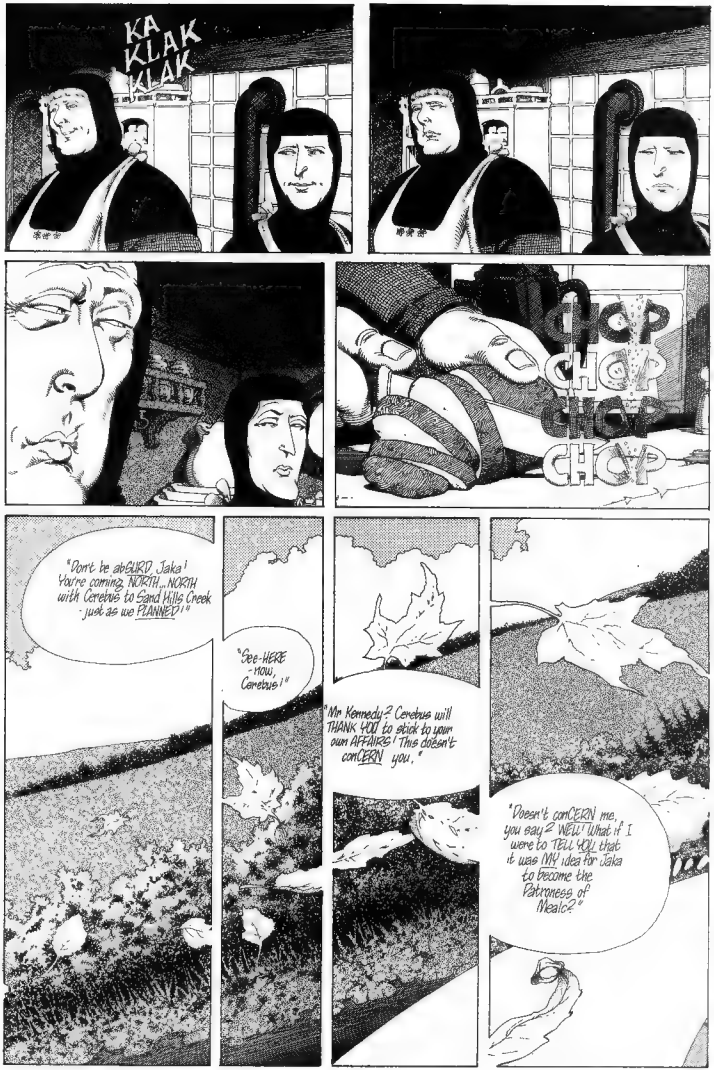
THROB TH
ZIP
THUMP
THROB THROB

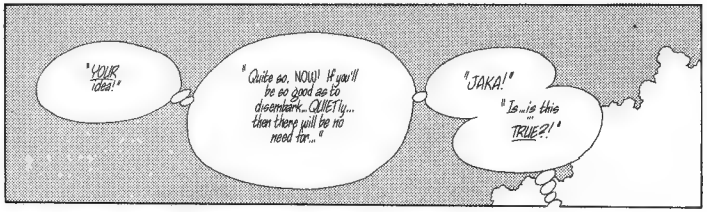
CHATTER CHATTER
?
PANT
KRROB

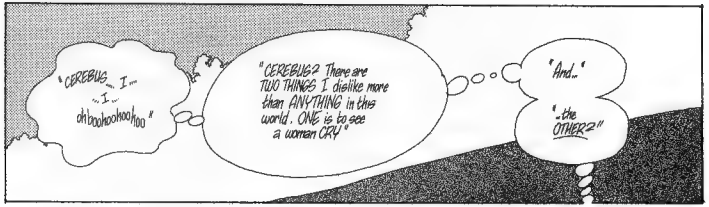
KA
KLACK
A-PI
SKIEFF
KLAK


HURT HIM?
OH HEAVENS NO
HA HA HA
WHAT AN IDEA
NO NO NO
AS THE GREAT CIRIN'S LAW CODE SAYS: "POTENTIAL HARASSMENT IS INTENDED HARASSMENT IS ACTUAL HARASSMENT"
THE SAME THING HAPPENED TO HIM THAT HAPPENED TO THAT DISAGREEABLE FELLOW WHO WAS IMITATING YOUR UNCLE JULIUS:
THE EMPOWERMENT OFFICERS JUST TOOK HIM A NUMBER OF MILES AWAY AND RELEASED HIM
WITH A STERN WARNING...
THAT HE WAS NOT TO BOTHER THE YOUNG WOMAN AGAIN
UNDER ANY CIRCUMSTANCES

FEEL BETTER?
KA-TY KLA-TY KLAK
MUCH BETTER
THANK YOU THANK YOU EVER SO
JAKA?
♪YES?
OH!
THE HOT TEA WITH HONEY AND LEMON
HA HA HA
I ALMOST FORGOT WHAT I'
WAS I'
WHAT I'
THANK YOU! I'M SURE TEA WILL MAKE HIM FEEL BETTER
THANKS
THANK YOU
THANK YOU

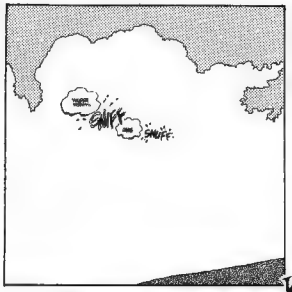

KA KLAK KLAK
CHOP CHOP CHOP CHOP
"Don't be absURD, Jaka! You're coming NORTH... NORTH with Cerebus to Sand Hills Creek - just as we PLANNED!"
"See-HERE - now, Cerebus!"
"Mr Kennedy? Cerebus will THANK YOU to stick to your own AFFAIRS! This doesn't conCERN you."
"Doesn't conCERN me, you say? WELL! What if I were to TELL YOU that it was MY idea for Jaka to become the Paramesse of Mealea?"

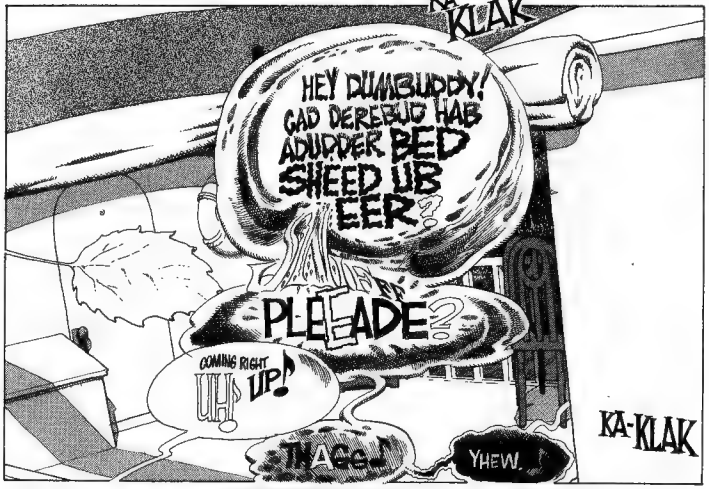

"YOUR idea!"
"Quite so, NOW! If you'll be so good as to disembark... QUIETly... then there will be no need for..."
"JAKA!"
"Is...is this TRUE?!"

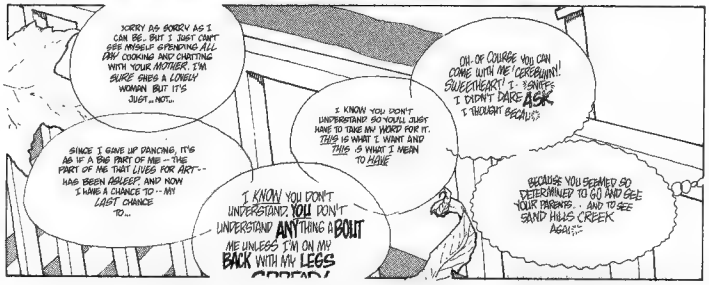

"CEREBUS... I... ...I... oh boohoohoo too"
"CEREBUS? There are TWO THINGS I dislike more than ANYTHING in this world. ONE is to see a woman CRY"
"And..."
"...the OTHER?"

"The OTHER is to STRIKE a man SMALLER than myself."
"HOWEVER, I have just now discovered that my ABHORRENCE of the FORMER QUITE supercedes my ANTIPATHY towards the LATTER!"
Throb
Throb
Cerebus showed FIGHT, but almost before his hands were up, F Stop Kennedy had KNOCKED HIM DOWN with ONE TERRIFIC BLOW!
And when he AROSE Kennedy QUICKLY sidestepped and FLOORED him DEFINITELY with a CRACK to the TEMPLE!
A-A

ARHOOD


SNIFF
SNIFF
WHEE
WHEE


KA-KLAK
HEY DUMBUDDY! GAD DEREBUD HAB ADUDDER BED SHEED UB EER?
PLEADE?
COMING RIGHT UP!
UH?
TNAGG-
YHEW.
KA-KLAK


SORRY AS SORRY AS I CAN BE, BUT I JUST CAN'T SEE MYSELF SPENDING ALL DAY COOKING AND CHATTING WITH YOUR MOTHER. I'M SURE SHE'S A LONELY WOMAN, BUT IT'S JUST...NOT...
OH-OF COURSE YOU CAN COME WITH ME CEREBWUN! SWEETHEART! I- SNIFF I DIDN'T DARE ASK, I THOUGHT BECAUSE
I KNOW YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND SO YOU'LL JUST HAVE TO TAKE MY WORD FOR IT. THIS IS WHAT I WANT AND THIS IS WHAT I MEAN TO HAVE
SINCE I GAVE UP DANCING, IT'S AS IF A BIG PART OF ME -- THE PART OF ME THAT LIVES FOR ART -- HAS BEEN ASLEEP AND NOW I HAVE A CHANCE TO -- MY LAST CHANCE TO...
I KNOW YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND. YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND ANYTHING ABOUT ME UNLESS I'M ON MY BACK WITH MY LEGS
BECAUSE YOU SEEMED SO DETERMINED TO GO AND SEE YOUR PARENTS... AND TO SEE SAND HILLS CREEK AGAIN!:-

LET GO!
JAKA IS COMING WITH CEREBUS
JAKA? JAKA! TELL THEM!
TELL THEM YOU'RE COMING WITH CEREBUS
IN THAT CASE, JAKA CEREBUS GUESSES THAT DAD HS ..
GOODBYE..
CEREBUS WILL GO UP TO BAND HILLS CREEK AND MAKE SURE HIS PARENTS ARE OKAY..
..AND THEN CEREBUS WILL CATCH THE FIRST BOAT SOUTH IN THE SPRING..
..AND MEET YOU IN NEALC BEFORE THE FESTIVAL OF SUMMER BONFIRE
CEREBUS CAN'T LIVE WITHOUT YOU, JAKA
YOU KNOW THAT ♪

CHASING SCOTT

continued from last issue

Great Literature? Well, perhaps not. Unless you consider a solid zeitgeist connection an indicator (if not a guarantee) of greatness. *Sir Singrim* Dak Raj at the Ambassador Hotel ("Pat Hobby, Putative Father") twenty-eight years before *Sirhan Sirhan* shot Senator Robert Kennedy definitely caught my eye. And I'd defy anyone to read "A Patriotic Short" (the Pat Hobby story that was on the stands at the time of Fitzgerald's death on December 21, 1940) without thinking of John F. Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe. Pardon? Oh, sure. It's just me. Sorry, I forget that all the time.

So, I closed the book and sat there thinking, "Well. Applause, applause, applause." The least I could do, since there wasn't much applause at the time. In a letter to Gingrich in June of 1940, Fitzgerald says, "Will you tell me what response you're getting from them, or does anyone care about anything now except the war?" (Good ol' shallow Scott.) And in October: "Deems Taylor paid me a compliment on the Hobby stories the other day. I had about decided nobody was reading them."

I put the book back on the shelf. It had definitely shaken something loose. In much the same way that I had found George Orwell's *Keep the Aspidistra Flying* inspirational in my teens (Gordon Comstock's life representing a "worst-case scenario" I could scarcely imagine for my late-20th-century career) Pat Hobby and F. Scott Fitzgerald—at the end of his rope and the end of his life, respectively—had gotten the fires of my own interest nicely banked. I wandered out into the library's entryway, pausing to look at a display of teen magazines in the oversized glass case. The title on one of the articles caught my eye.

"Boys We Love."

An odd bit of synchronicity, reminding me of *Esquire's* annual "Women We Love" feature.

"Boys We Love."

I thought about Fitzgerald desperately churning out his Pat Hobby stories at the same age that I am now—not knowing he had less than a year to live. How he was probably thinking about Lois Moran when he wrote "one cute little blonde actress is pretty much the same as another" in one Pat Hobby story and mentioned one of her movies, *Stella Dallas*, in another. I thought about the paragraph in "Afternoon of an Author." The one with all the girls crossing the street. I looked it up later:

> The street narrowed as the business section began and there were suddenly brightly dressed girls, all very beautiful—he thought he had never seen such beautiful girls. There were men too but they all looked rather silly, like himself in the mirror, and there were old, undecorative women, and presently, too, there were plain and unpleasant faces among the girls; but in general they were lovely, dressed in real colors all the way from six to thirty, no plans or struggles in their faces, only a state of sweet suspension, provocative and serene. He loved life—terribly for a minute, not wanting to give it up at all.

The Aesthetic Moment which I first became aware of around the age of forty—the same age Fitzgerald was when he wrote the piece. I turned towards the automatic sliding doors, thinking about the Aesthetic Moment. The doors opened.

And a woman beside me shrieked.

You know that shriek that only women can do? The one that translates as: "Oh, I was surprised just now"?

Carol has now "input" (what a wonderfully depraved computer term—"input") the remainder of "Chasing Scott," and there's a fair amount of room left over. So, even though it has only tangential relevance to F. Scott Fitzgerald, let me take a little more space than I originally intended for "The Aesthetic Moment."

THE AESTHETIC MOMENT

Why do rock stars marry?

I could never understand that one. Particularly the Beatles or the Rolling Stones. Of course, within the ranks of the unfairer sex, the answer is easy: they each found that one special woman, their kindred spirit with whose heart and whose heart alone their very soul might blah blah blah. Even in my twenties I was sophisticated enough to say, "No, that can't be it." All that rubbish does for popular consumption, but, I mean, you have legions of adolescent girls tearing your clothes off and you pick one? What for? I mean, it's not as if she's going to do the dusting up and fix you toast and coffee in the morning—that's what you have servants and toadies for.

I was a virgin when I met my ex-wife, and two years later I married her—mostly because I was having an affair with an eighteen-year-old and it seemed like the right thing to do. I was with Deni first, so she gets to be the wife, the eighteen-year-old gets to continue as the mistress—with Deni's complete knowledge and, I thought (foolish me), acceptance. I was a good practising secular humanist who could rationalize with the best of them at the time: all morality is relative, all ethics are situational, blah blah blah.

Well, when the marriage broke up and the eighteen-year-old had long gone the way of all mistresses and the rebound romance imploded over the course of an excruciatingly ridiculous or ridiculously excruciating year, I set out to answer my question.

Why do rock stars marry?

Not that I was a rock star. I had a certain amount of fame, a certain amount of money, neither of which were

enough to show up on any but the smallest female radar screens. That was one of the first things that I found out. Fame and wealth are a short cut, but getting laid a lot has more to do with attitude, a strange kind of sincerity and honesty. I sincerely and honestly a) did *not* want to get married again, b) did *not* want a girlfriend, c) *did* want to have sex. Once this connects with female mind-reading, your scoring percentages go way up. I mean, WAY up. I wasn't discriminating apart from drawing the line at "ugly fucks" (as we called them back then). It is an important distinction that most guys miss, the reason that most guys wonder why it's the jerks who get laid all the time and—more to the point—why behaving like a jerk doesn't work for *them* when they try it. You can't fool mind-reading. You might be swearing a blue streak, drinking like a fish, smoking like a chimney, and pissing in the hostess's flowerbed, but there isn't a woman who is going to think, "Ooh! I *want* him." They know it's just an act and inside you're snivelling and begging, "Please I need a girlfriend." Even ugly fucks stay as far away from that as they can. If you genuinely and sincerely *don't* want a girlfriend and *don't* want to get married and *do* want to have sex, you will have no problem.

I had no problem. I would go on various "runs." Another guy's girlfriend would present herself. I'd sleep with her For the next two or three weeks it was all other guys' girlfriends. Oh, hello there. Pardon? Sure, let's go.

In that. .state?...it's really interesting to look at other guys who are having problems with women. I'd sleep with the girlfriend and it was no big deal, but I could see *him* twisting himself into knots. And *him* was *me*. I mean not *me at the time*, but *me when I had a girlfriend and she slept with someone else*. I remember talking with my friend George about it a while back. He had actually gone so far as to get engaged, which really put him on the other side from where he had been. I had just come off a multi-year relationship. We agreed that it was as if we were watching ourselves and saying, "This doesn't work. I've watched guys doing this and I have thought, 'Pal, that is not the way to get results.'" And yet there we both had found ourselves, both arms and both legs, up to the shoulders and up to the groin stuck in the tarbabyette

But getting back to the answer that I got to my question. Why do rock stars marry?

It is one reaction to the only discovery you can make when you experience various levels of intimacy with that many women: they are all the same. Their hair is a different colour, they are taller or shorter, their breasts are larger or smaller, their genitalia are sloppy and sprawling or tight and attractive. But they all say the same things; everything about them swirls around a central all-consuming vortex:

I'm different, aren't I? I'm special, aren't I? I'm different from all those others, aren't I?

If it weren't such a central human tragedy, such a central tragedy of existence, it would almost be funny. At various times I thought it was *very* funny. It's all funny until, as a man, it forces you to come to the realization that you are alone. I mean, *really* alone. Not alone-until-I-find-her, not alone-until-she-comes-back.

Alone.

Because mind-reading cuts two ways. When you finally get tired of sleeping with women in an extended sequence—a couple of weeks with this one, a month with that one, three in one weekend (I actually did that once and never got around to sleeping with the one I ostensibly went to see)—and you find one that is in the upper range of physical attractiveness where you think, "Yes. Let's wake up next to that one for a while," you have to face the question of "how long is a while?" And even as you're thinking that *that's* your biggest concern, you are looking at someone who is looking back and who, in various ways and overtones and undertones of meaning, is asking:

I'm different, aren't I? I'm special, aren't I? I'm different from all those others, aren't I?

Having decided that you will rest here for a time, having decided that you are setting no term limit for the time that you will rest here, you try to answer the question positively. You try to find a variety of ways to answer the questions that will introduce some level of reassurance. But you are not being honest and you are not being sincere, and so things don't "work" the way they did when you *were* being honest and sincere—*honestly* not wanting to get married, *honestly* not wanting a girlfriend, *honestly* just wanting to get laid. You can fool her, but you can't fool her mind-reading abilities. If she is the same as all the others and you know that to be true, she knows that you know.

There *are* ways around it. I remember being dumbfounded in conversation with a comic-book artist once who told me that he freely admitted that there was nothing different or special about his wife—nothing about her that set her apart from the other women he had "gone out with," "had been seeing," or "been with" (to use the unfairer sex's euphemisms, which always circumscribe the physical act). He would never tell *her* that, of course, but it certainly seemed to work or at least "work." They have been together a long time. At some level her mind-reading was fully aware of the state of things but obviously accepted it. The fellow in question is a very honest and sincere individual. Perhaps that's all it takes.

I know of another instance where the fellow said to the girl, "I don't think I love you, but if you can live with that, I'd like to marry you." And they've been together a looooooong time. Again, honesty and sincerity win the day? "Just be yourself"?

Why *do* rock stars marry?

If you really can't stand the thought of being alone, if you really can't face—face-to-face—the fact that all women are, the same, you have to sell yourself a bill of goods. I mean REALLY sell yourself so that you genuinely transpose reality and fantasy—that is, knowingly induce in yourself a schizophrenic state where you actually believe that *your* wife or *your* girlfriend is different from and superior to every other woman in the world,

even and (a still greater lunacy) *especially those you have never met*. The "selling job" has to be "deep" enough to fool her mind-reading, which means deeper than conscious awareness. For myself, I have never been able to accept "letting go" of reality like that. At the very least, it seems foolish to put all of those eggs into one schizophrenic basket. But anything short of that doesn't work or "work." Because women are tacticians and not strategists, they always up the ante when they see that you won't let go of reality, so they either withdraw—See? You need me—or try to catch you in the jealousy nutcracker by flirtation or infidelity—See? You don't want anyone else to have me. In the latter case, you end up looking at yourself (as you tie yourself up in knots) smiling back at yourself and saying "Pal, that is not the way to get results."

On the female side of things, you can see these principles in operation anytime that some new "Sexiest Man Alive" arrives on the scene. There is an escalating intensity of public interest at the tabloid television, magazine and newspaper level on the part of the unfairer sex centering on the question "Which one will he pick?" Not "Who will he sleep with?" That's just the regular season or the first few rounds of the playoffs for women. The epicenter, the place where the rubber hits the road, the Stanley Cup, the World Series pennant is Which Woman, after he has had every woman throw herself at him, after he has sampled dozens, hundreds for a night, a week, a month, a year, Which One who asks him, (as all the others have asked him):

I'm different, aren't I? I'm special, aren't I? I'm different from all those others, aren't I?

I'm...THE ONE...AREN'T I?

...To Which One does he say: *Yes. Yes. You. Are. The. One.*

Of course, as soon as he does, every *other* woman in the world—having given The One the once over and having seen nothing about her that they haven't seen in any number of interchangeable members of their own gender—completely loses interest in the "Sexiest Man Alive" and his interchangeable frau and move on to the next "Sexiest Man Alive".

One of the legions of women who slept with John F. Kennedy said (I'm paraphrasing here) "To Jack Kennedy a woman was just like an extra piece of pie with his coffee."

There is something irrefutably vulgar about that. Whatever it is that women are, however interchangeable they are, it is vulgar, unethical and immoral, in my view, to treat them as if they were an extra piece of pie to have with your coffee. In an ideal world perhaps there might be something to be said for different coloured armbands or bracelets. Orange might mean "Just Another Piece of Pie" on a woman, on a man: "Looking for a Piece of Pie". It would still, in my view, have the stink of the vulgar, the unethical and the immoral about it.

I had occasion to be out having a few drinks with a married couple I know and a friend of theirs. Let's call them Mike and Rebecca and Doug—because that's their names. Everything Doug said was weird. We were at Sammy's Garage first. Well, you can't really converse over the music, but Doug and I would exchange a few words, and everything he said was...weird. Then I found out that he was newly-separated from his wife whom he had married, like, fifteen years ago. Then everything he had said made sense. Basically he was wondering where "the action" is—which is something you would only say if you were totally insane or if you were newly-separated and had been married since the 1980's. I tried explaining about women reading minds and that he had to know what he wanted. Did he want to get laid or did he want a girlfriend or was he looking for his next wife, or what? Well, typical of newly-separated men he didn't really understand the question, nor could I make him understand that I couldn't answer *his* question until he answered *my* question. There was much joking when we moved on to Howl at the Moon about "pick-up lines" and showing Doug how to get laid, etc. etc..

On the way to Howl at the Moon, we passed Sammy's Social Club and Doug and I both looked in through the open front at the same time. There was a very shapely redhead standing at one of the tables with her back to us, talking to some friends. At the exact moment that we looked in, she shifted her weight from one foot to the other.

There, you see? I said to him. Did you see that? That was perfect. That was an Aesthetic Moment. Have you ever seen anything so beautiful in your whole life? He was smiling, grinning from ear-to-ear, nodding his agreement.

But how do you "get" one of those, he wanted to know.

I shook my head. You're missing the point. That's as good as it gets. You can go back there and we can go in and you can look at her. What if she has a huge nose or crossed eyes? Even if she's gorgeous, what sort of psychic baggage is she dragging around with her? What's her history, what does she whine about, what is she neurotic about? Complications, intricacies, knots. Be happy with what you got. For free. I continued in this vein at Howl at the Moon and later at Stages, but I was basically wasting my breath. Doug had no frame of reference for what I was talking about. He wanted to know how to get laid and he couldn't understand that that wasn't going to happen until he figured out for himself, definitively, that that was *all* that he wanted.

How much better—how *infinitely* preferable—the Aesthetic Moment.

It's like walking past a good Italian restaurant and the kitchen exhaust fan is pumping out that mixture of fresh pasta, tomato paste, garlic and seasonings. That, too, is an Aesthetic Moment. I have enough money. I can go in and eat a whole lasagne, a basket of garlic bread, a Caesar salad and several glasses of good red wine—and come out an hour or two later, bloated, overstuffed and faintly nauseous. That, to be sure, will *not* be an Aesthetic Moment. Later that night or early in the morning in the bathroom will DEFINITELY not be an

Aesthetic Moment. The former case is me in my forties. The latter case is me in my twenties and thirties. The former is those Moments usually days apart, often weeks apart when I see One of Them and my breath is taken away, there is a faint stirring in my groin.

The latter is, well, the old relationship grind or just getting laid.

You don't have to draw too many women or draw any woman too often to recognize what a marvellous feat of construction they are. Parabolic curves which lead into other parabolic curves which intersect other parabolic curves, a *symphony* of curves, dovetailing, intersecting, merging and leading…

…exactly nowhere.

I think there is a lesson in that. A profound lesson or at the very least a "profound" lesson. A lesson which men stubbornly and perversely have refused to learn through many, many centuries. It seemed and seems to me a good first step or at least a good compromise to retreat to the Aesthetic Moment as the sum total of my dealings with women. Rather like having the sound off when I'm channel-surfing. It would be better if I gave up television altogether, but it's at least a start or a compromise or a half-assed step in the right direction to have no sound. I strongly recommend it, in much the same way that I strongly recommend self-publishing: knowing that very few men are going to try it, almost all men will think I'm nuts for even suggesting it and many men will be offended and take it as a personal insult that I think it's a good idea. But I do think it's a good idea. A very good idea—particularly in my forties, although I think it would have been an equally good idea in my twenties and thirties. A much better idea, a more ethical idea than either thinking of women as another piece of pie with my coffee or of any individual woman as someone to abandon reality for in favour of schizophrenic self-deception—or any "station" along that particular stretch of societal railway line.

But, I'm getting ahead of myself again.

Meanwhile, back at the library:

She walked out ahead of me through the doors. She looked good, as they say, walking away. Not quite in the Aesthetic Moment category, but not more than a few shadings off of it. Outside, she stopped, one hand pressed—rather fetchingly—to her not indeficient bosom. I stopped, as well. Grinning at her.

"You going to be okay?" I asked.

I noticed she had a pierced navel (I'm different, aren't I? I'm special, aren't I? I'm different from all those others, aren't I? No. You're just in the group that pierces and tattoos itself. You're not different.)

"I'll be fine." she said, looking (as they say) deep into my eyes. She smiled radiantly. "As soon as my heart stops pounding."

For those guys who consider giving the Aesthetic Moment a try, this is the strange flip side of the Aesthetic Moment—the Contrived Encounter (what was the shriek about? The automatic doors opening scared her? "As soon as my heart stops pounding?"). The first time it happened, I couldn't have been more surprised than if I had hit a station while channel-surfing that said, "Well, hello there, Dave Sim!" in big orange letters. After she says her line—whatever it is—in the Contrived Encounter, there is a pregnant pause (I think I know where the term comes from now) and (I swear) it's as if you can hear a thousand female voices hissing from the wings, "'What's your name?' C'mon! It's YOUR LINE NEXT: 'What's your NAME?'"

It all has something in common with "nature abhors a vacuum." Nature does indeed "abhor a vacuum." but I have maintained for some time that it is equally true that "nature ADORES a vacuum." Which, I guess, is something of an Aesthetic Moment for ol' nature, isn't it?

I shook my head a little bit and turned away.

By the time I reached Queen Street, I could feel it all start to come together. One of those rare times when I was able to be completely aware of and grateful for what I have. Not only what I have, but what I *don't* have. I don't have a wife who requires expensive institutionalized care. I don't have a daughter that I have to put through college (according to Gingrich's introduction Scottie always had a kind word for the Pat Hobby stories. "Why, he sent me to Vassar"). I don't have a producer or a director rewriting my work on the set without telling me. I don't have a studio executive who is going to decide whether or not I have a job the following week.

I got back to the studio and knew what I wanted to do next. I wanted to write a Pat Hobby story. Not knowing what would come out, I rolled a sheet of paper into the typewriter and pounded out the following (which I present just as I wrote it, atrocious punctuation and all):

Pat Veteran rubbed his eyes and endeavoured to follow the conversation which had given him the slip sometime in the last quarter hour.

"Some sort of Laughs," Mr. Marcus was saying. "Big laughs."

"But I thought," Pat Veteran said, quite reasonably he thought, "that it was a serious piece." Remembering that he had two fifty a week riding on the perpetuation of the already seemingly endless writing of "Fall and the River", he quickly corrected himself. "is a serious piece."

"Well it is," Marcus agreed with a wayward fidelity which identified his complete lack of ethics, for which Pat Veteran instantly forgave him in consideration of his expressing it in the present tense. "That's why it needs some big laughs," as if to show he knew a "thing or two about writing", he added, "To balance off all that serious stuff."

Pat Veteran felt himself slipping away from the immediate conversation to the small cafe outside the studio gates and the glittering display of bottles of all shapes and sizes, risen, like a tide, against the mirrors along the back wall. Pat Veteran envied those bottles just now wishing that he, too, could rise like a tide against the mirrors along the back wall. Or bet-

ter yet against the stately but brainless blonde who had exited the library just ahead of him. Much better than mirrors, thought Pat Veteran to himself.

"He should do something," Marcus was saying as Pat Veteran's tide came back in or went back out like some great and uncertain metaphor.

"Who?" he asked dully.

"F. Stop Kennedy." Mr. Marcus was saying, savouring his self-evident assertion as if it were his own particle theory, come to dismantle the way graphic novels had been done up to now. "He should do something." To the Mr. Marcus' of this world there is no observation so banal that it does not bear repeating—as immediately as is humanly possible.

"He could get stinking, roaring drunk," Pat Veteran found himself saying. "A bit at a time, see? So it sneaks up on him. He could think he was being debonair, suave—making all these plans in his head of how he was going to make time with Jaka, little set pieces that go wrong." Remembering who he was talking to, he added, "Like Wile E. Coyote with a hard-on in his pants."

There was nothing like intentional vulgarity to achieve resonance with Mr. Marcuses (Marcusi?) of this world.

"He wants to fuck the Roadrunner." Mr. Marcus' face was a mask of sincere solemnity.

"Exactly," said Pat Veteran, wondering, all the while, what specifically it was that he had done wrong in a past life that it had come down to this.

I reread it thinking, that's not bad. That's not bad at all.

I photocopied the issue number/month cover "bullets" for 248, 249, and 250 from Ger's master sheet (he crosses one off every month—there's a "300 MAR" in the bottom row that's perfectly hypnotizing) and taped them above my Pat Veteran piece.

Then I rolled another sheet of paper into the typewriter and typed:

> Shooting Script, Fall and the River, The Three "Comrades", 248, 249, 250, AKA: Winky, Blinky and Noddy, AKA: F. STOP KENNEDY, CEREBUS and JAKA, AKA: Nov 99, Dec 99, Jan 00.

The Three Comrades (MGM, 1937) was the only film on which F. Scott Fitzgerald received a screen credit.

I prepared myself to type out my first comic-book script in more than twenty-five years (not including *Spawn* 10).

It was only after making the decision that I saw it had an interesting logic-of-the-next-step quality about it. In late 20th century populist jargon, having begun "Fall and the River" imitating as closely as possible F. Scott Fitzgerald's work habits at the time of *The Beautiful and Damned*, finishing "Fall and the River" with a Hollywood-style "shooting script" represented...*closure*.

Closure?! Blecchh.

Let's go back to "logic-of-the-next-step".

By my best reckoning, of the sixty pages that remained to be finished, forty to fifty of them were already accounted for: their dialogue, pacing, "camera angles" and sequences clarified but otherwise pretty much unchanged from the initial stages of "Fall and the River's" composition.

As the "Producer" of "Fall and the River", I imagined myself handing a first draught of the remaining sixty pages to my "Writer" self [the two of us—Mr. Marcus and Pat Veteran, respectively—having already "taken a meeting" on what should be done to build a bridge from page 326—the last page which had been "filmed"—to page 340. It was now my "Writer" self's job to fulfil the script doctor role on the project—part writer, part stenographer—and deliver to the "Director" (my "Artist" self) a tight finished script: the working theory being that my "Producer" and "Writer" could then move on to book three of *Going Home* while the "Director" finished "filming" the end of book two.

Well, the "best-laid plans..." and all that. What I had failed to take into account was the addition of the "Journalist"—a role unique to "Fall and the River": the writer of these annotations. My "Writer" self finished the shooting script, my "Director" self finished "filming" pages 326 to 365, my "Producer" and "Writer" selves moved on to the treatment, development and research stage of book three...

When suddenly—thanks to the demands of monthly serialization—the "Writer" has now had to backtrack, put on his "Journalist" cap and take several days to document the whole process while everyone else sits around twiddling his thumbs.

"Hurry up and wait" (as the old Hollywood expression goes.)]

FULL SCRIPT VS. "MARVEL METHOD"

Interestingly (or, perhaps, *synchronistically*) enough, just as I had finished the "shooting script" for the remaining sixty pages, Mark Evanier, a columnist for the *Comics Buyer's Guide* an "industry" "trade" paper (all right, that *is* stretching the Hollywood metaphor to the breaking point and beyond) did an interesting series of columns on "What's wrong with comic-books today" (on one level), "writers vs. artists" (on another level) and "full script vs. the 'Marvel method'" (on that level of insular and incestuous navel-gazing that—when we used to go to comic-book conventions—would always send Ger to the bar for a double scotch).

For those of you fortunate enough to live your lives (like Gerhard) *outside* the parameters of the comic-book "industry" (most of the "inmates" actually call it that), a brief description:

continued next issue